



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

PERSPECTIVES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

Teacher Education through Open and Distance Learning

Patrick Alan Danaher and Abdurrahman Umar, Editors

Contributors

Tian Belawati is Professor (Education) in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences at the Indonesia Open University (known as Universitas Terbuka), Jakarta, Indonesia, where she currently is the Rector (President). She has been working and conducting research in the field of distance education for over 24 years. Her research interests include the management of distance education, learning support services, and the utilisation of information and communication technologies for distance education. She also currently serves as the President of the Asian Association of Open Universities and is a member of the International Council for Open and Distance Education Executive Committee.

Email: tian.belawati@gmail.com

Hilary Burgess is a Senior Lecturer and Director for Postgraduate Studies in the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET) at the Open University, United Kingdom. She is also Academic Coordinator and leader of the university's Research Careers Advisory Team in the Research School with a university-wide remit for research career support and training. Her research and publications are in the areas of primary school teaching, mentoring, learning communities and postgraduate training. She is co-author of the book *Achieving Your Doctorate in Education*. In September 2010, she will be taking up a post as Reader in Education at the University of Leicester.

Email: h.m.m.burgess@open.ac.uk

Patrick Alan Danaher is Associate Professor in Education (Education Research) in the Faculty of Education at the Toowoomba campus of the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, where he is also currently Deputy Dean, Associate Dean (Research) and Program Coordinator (Doctoral Programs). His research interests include: educational mobilities; educational research ethics, methods and politics; the work and identities of academics, educators and researchers; lifelong education; open and distance education; rural education; and vocational education and training. He is co-author of *Mobile Learning Communities: Creating New Educational Futures* (Routledge 2009) and *Teaching Traveller Children: Maximising Learning Outcomes* (Trentham Books 2007).

Email: patrick.danaher@usq.edu.au

R.E. (Bobby) Harreveld is Director of the Learning and Teaching Education Research Centre and Associate Professor in the School of Learning and Innovation at the Rockhampton campus of CQUniversity, Australia. Bobby's current teaching and research are focused on investigating questions around the curriculum, technologically mediated pedagogies and epistemologies of teaching and teacher education. This work is located among the education systems of universities,

vocational colleges, schools, workplaces and community learning settings. Bobby is supervising a number of research higher degree students in this area.

Email: b.harreveld@cqu.edu.au

Debra Hoven is an Associate Professor in Distance Education at Athabasca University, Canada's Open University, where she teaches and supervises graduate research students in the areas of innovative pedagogies for online and mobile contexts, emerging approaches to instructional design for distance education, multimedia and digital storytelling, and e-portfolio applications, particularly in Aboriginal education and the evaluation of appropriate technology solutions in intercultural contexts. Another major research interest of hers is the role of social software and virtual worlds in promoting social and emotional cohesion in online learning and professional communities. Debra has considerable experience teaching languages and teacher education in Australia and several Asian countries and now teaches in the online Masters and Doctoral programmes in the Centre for Distance Education at Athabasca University.

Email: debrah@athabascau.ca

Sólveig Jakobsdóttir is Associate Professor (Distance Education) and Director of the Center for Research on ICT and Media in Education in the School of Education at the University of Iceland, Iceland. She has been involved in research, teaching, policy-making and evaluation of distance learning at the upper secondary and tertiary levels in Iceland. Her research has also been on ICT use and online learning at the primary and secondary levels in Iceland, with a focus on ICT-related skills and competencies. Other research interests include social networking and the development of learning and professional communities online.

Email: soljak@hi.is

Benjamin Kehrwald has been involved with educational technologies for the last 15 years. His professional portfolio includes design, development and teaching in online and blended learning situations in the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. He is Senior Lecturer (Distance and Online Education) in the College of Education at Massey University, New Zealand, where he co-ordinates online postgraduate teaching in e-learning, supervises postgraduate research into aspects of e-learning, and researches applications of technology in higher education. Ben's research interests centre on online social presence and technology-mediated social processes such as collaboration and online community. His work integrating distance education practices into blended approaches to teacher education at Massey University was recognised by the Distance Education Association of New Zealand's 2010 Award for Excellence in Distance Education.

Email: b.a.kehrwald@massey.ac.nz

Colin Latchem was formerly Head of the Teaching Learning Group at Curtin University, Western Australia, and President of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia. He has also been a visiting professor and consultant in Asia, the South Pacific and the Caribbean. His most recent book is *Distance and Blended Learning in Asia* (Routledge 2010) and he is currently co-editing *Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Distance Education* for Routledge. He has authored numerous chapters and articles and has been keynote speaker at

many international conferences. He is Asia-Pacific Corresponding Editor for the *British Journal of Educational Technology* and an editorial board member of other international journals.

Email: clatchem@iinet.net.au

Lindy McKeown is an educational consultant currently working with the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, to develop its strategy for implementing virtual worlds. She has worked across the world to develop e-learning solutions for staff professional development and online courses with many institutions and corporations including the British Council (United Kingdom); Appalachian State University (United States) and Xerox Research Labs (United States); and the Queensland University of Technology, Curriculum Corporation and Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (Australia). Among the awards she has received, Lindy was chosen as the 2006 Outstanding Leader of the Year by the International Society for Technology in Education. As a teleworker, Lindy uses the technologies she teaches about in her work with organisations and educational institutions around the world.

Email: lindyaustralia@gmail.com

Bob Moon is Professor of Education (Teaching Studies) at the Open University, United Kingdom. Prior to that he was a secondary school teacher and head teacher. He was the founding director of the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) programme (www.tessafrica.net), which won the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher Education. He has provided advice on teacher development to a wide range of countries, as well as international organisations such as the Commonwealth of Learning, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union, the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). He has published extensively in the fields of curriculum and teacher and international education. His most recent work, written with the late Professor Jenny Leach, is *The Power of Pedagogy*, published by Sage (2008).

Email: r.e.moon@open.ac.uk

Glen Postle is Honorary Professor at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, where he was Associate Director (Academic) of the Distance Education Centre until his retirement in 2002. He has researched and published in the following areas: instructional design for open and distance learning; teaching and learning online; access and equity; and technology-enhanced learning. He has also worked in funded consultancies involving open and distance learning in the Solomon Islands (the World Bank), Pakistan (the Asian Development Bank and the Commonwealth of Learning) and Malawi (the Malawi Ministry of Education); and he has also worked at the University of Stirling, Scotland, as a Senior Research Fellow. Since his retirement Glen has been a consultant for the World Bank's Teaching and Learning Development Centre in Tokyo, Japan, and worked with the Metropolitan South Institute of Technical and Further Education in Brisbane, Australia, to co-ordinate a staff development programme in online teaching and learning.

Email: glen.postle@usq.edu.au

Ann Shelton Mayes is Professor of Education and Dean of the School of Education at the University of Northampton, United Kingdom. She was formerly Director of Initial Teacher Education at the Open University and led the development of the flexible Postgraduate Certificate in Education. Her research interests and publications are in the areas of initial and in-service teacher education, focusing on the early professional development of teachers, open and distance learning, mentoring and quality enhancement.

Email: ann.shelton@northampton.ac.uk

Mary Simpson is Associate Professor and Associate Dean (Teacher Education) in the College of Education at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Mary has developed and led distance delivery options for initial teacher education programmes. Her research interests are in teacher education and distance and online education. Currently she is working in research projects that evaluate: the use of blended learning in a redesigned teacher education programme; support networks formed by distance students; and the introduction of personalised practicum for early childhood teacher education students. Mary supervises doctoral students and teaches distance-delivered courses for teachers who are advancing their qualifications.

Email: mary.simpson@otago.ac.nz

Ken Stevens is a Professor of Education at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada, where he was appointed to a chair in e-learning, funded by Industry Canada. His previous appointments were at James Cook University in Queensland and at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. In Australia, New Zealand and Canada, he has specialised in the provision of education in rural communities and the application of information technologies for teaching and learning in and between schools in sparsely populated areas. Recently he was cross-appointed as Adjunct Professor of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. He lives in Canada and New Zealand.

Email: stevensk@mun.ca

Bruce Thompson is an independent consultant in training and development, following a previous career in research and development for the Open Learning Agency in Vancouver, Canada. His interests include the use of instructional technologies to develop and deliver distance education in rural areas, and the development of education staff to produce materials and to teach through open and distance methodologies. His knowledge of instructional design for distance learning has led to involvement with the University of British Columbia and the British Columbia Institute of Technology as well as with businesses and government organisations. He has also been involved in numerous workshops and training programmes throughout the Commonwealth, setting up countrywide training programmes for the World Bank in Vietnam and Bangladesh and writing courses for university open and distance learning programmes.

Email: brucethom99@hotmail.com

Mark A. Tyler is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the Toowoomba campus of the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Mark has a background in human services and technical and further education teaching. His expertise lies in learning and teaching within the workplace and distance education. His academic interests

are critical spirit, criticality, teacher identities, mentoring, teaching and learning in vocational and technical education, lifelong learning, and workplace learning.

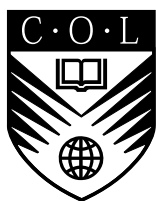
Email: mark.tyler@usq.edu.au

Abdurrahman Umar is the Education Specialist–Teacher Education, and Team Leader–Education, at the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada. Prior to joining the Commonwealth of Learning, he was the Director of Academic Services at the National Teachers’ Institute in Kaduna, Nigeria, and had also served as the Head of Department of Education at Usmanu Danfodio University in Sokoto, Nigeria. His research interests are teacher education, open and distance learning, nomadic education and the political economy of education.

Email: aumar@col.org

I.G.A.K. Wardani is Professor of Education (Curriculum and Instruction) in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences at Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia. Her main interest is curriculum development and effective instruction, especially for elementary teacher education. Since 1990 she has been involved either as team leader, team member, speaker or trainer in a large number of workshops, seminars and training sessions that relate to curriculum development and quality improvement of instruction and that are conducted by the Directorate General of Higher Education. Currently she is initiating a team on developing effective instruction for distance teacher education, focused on skills and attitude building.

Email: wardani@mail.ut.ac.id



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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

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1055 West Hastings, Suite 1200
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Telephone: +1 604 775 8200

Fax: +1 604 775 8210

Web: www.col.org

E-mail: info@col.org

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Preface

Now that most countries have made solid progress towards the achievement of universal primary schooling by 2015, the world faces two other major educational challenges. The first, which results partly from the success of the campaign for primary education, is to give older children and young adults opportunities for secondary schooling. This is a massive task. One estimate puts the number of 12- to 17-year-olds who are not receiving education at 400 million (Binder 2006).

Scarcely less daunting is the second global challenge – and the primary motivation for this book – which is the need to recruit and train many millions of teachers. UNESCO estimates that some 10 million teachers must be recruited and trained in less than a decade. They will be needed to: replace the large numbers of teachers due to retire in many countries; complete the drive to universal primary schooling, particularly in Africa and South Asia; and address the challenge of secondary schooling (UNESCO 2008, p. 22).

Sadly, because the status of the teaching profession has declined in all but a few countries, recruiting teachers on this scale may prove to be “mission impossible.” However, even if we can recruit them, it will certainly not be possible to train them using the traditional methods of institutional pre-service education. Open and distance learning (ODL) must be harnessed to the task because many countries have already found that it allows them to provide training of consistent quality to large numbers at low cost.

But the importance of ODL for the future of teacher education is far more than a simple matter of volume and economics. It is an answer to the third major challenge preoccupying education ministers, namely the quality of schooling at all levels. When I met South Africa’s newly appointed Minister of Basic Education, The Hon. Matsie Angelina Motshekga, in 2010, she was proud of her country’s progress in expanding access to primary education but disappointed in the achievements of the pupils. Her fellow ministers worldwide have similar anxieties.

UNESCO has provided a useful analysis of the elements that make for educational quality (UNESCO 2004, pp. 66, 142). Well-trained teachers feature high on the list – provided that their training focuses as much on classroom realities as on pedagogical theories. This is where ODL comes into its own. It not only enables in-service teacher education to take place in the schools, but also, through the growing use of information and communication technology (ICT), it makes possible the creation of virtual communities of practice in which working teachers can learn from experienced practitioners and from each other.

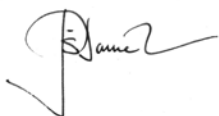
As the book’s title implies, the various chapters explore the challenge of ODL in teacher education from many perspectives. Elsewhere (Daniel 2010, p. 84) I have

noted that that teacher education is a “confused mess” in many parts of the world. The authors in this book have grappled with that confusion and with the often incoherent goals of teacher education. They have had to bring new thinking to the field because teacher education policy inherited from the 20th century has little relevance to the 21st century. It failed to address the crisis of teacher recruitment; it was poorly co-ordinated with school systems; and it did not take account of the potential of ODL and ICTs to do things differently.

The irrelevance of earlier policy has given the authors in this volume a fresh canvas on which to work. Their various contributions examine the research base and underlying principles and policies before exploring new learning and teaching strategies for both pre-service and in-service teacher education. Much space is devoted to the potential of ICT but, lest it be thought that ICT is mainly a rich-world phenomenon, we learn how hundreds of thousands of African teachers are receiving training in their schools through the TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa) programme and its use of open educational resources.

I congratulate the editors, Patrick Alan Danaher and Abdurrahman Umar, on bringing these contributions together and providing a scene-setting introduction and concluding remarks. For three reasons the book should be seen as a work in progress. First, the world is only just waking up to the crisis of teacher recruitment. Second, teacher education is in a period of transition as its focus switches from long pre-service courses to school-based in-service education and continuous professional development. Third, ODL is itself in a state of flux as it draws upon an increasingly powerful mix of media and technologies.

Teacher educators must find their way across these shifting sands. This book provides some of the answers to the questions they will face as they tackle the most pressing educational challenges of the 21st century.



Sir John Daniel
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

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